WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 FEBRUARY 1999

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

DETROIT OBSERVATORY RESTORED TO 1854 APPEARANCE

See page 2 for story.

Photo by P.S. Whitesell

KAREN'S COLUMN:
LOTS OF DETAILS NEED TO BE FINISHED BEFORE MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET OPENS;NEED HANDY PERSON

Details, details, details! As anyone who has ever built a house knows, there are many details involved in finishing the interior. That is where we are now at the Museum on Main Street.

The restroom and upstairs kitchenette are being completed. Cabinets, fixtures, light switches, floor registers, tile—the list of finishing touches for the whole house goes on and on. Fortunately, we are getting wonderful help coping with all the details from our architect, Paul Darling of Quinn Evans/ Architects.

The Museum experienced some problems during the severe weather and deep snows of January. Our roof, along with many others in our area, built up a great deal of ice along the eaves, resulting in significant ice dam difficulties.

Luckily the leaks were not too bad, though we did have some water running down our newly plastered walls. Every thing got dried out quickly and there seems to be no permanent damage. We are looking at what must be done to prevent this situation in the future.

In recent issues of the *IMPRESSIONS* I have mentioned projects that we have needed help with. Each time, someone has stepped forward. For instance, Pat Thompson agreed to be in charge of the garden.

Now, Sally Silvennoinen has answered our plea for someone to oversee the traveling exhibits, *LIFE BEFORE ELECTRICITY and FROM HATS TO SPATS* as well as the *WHAT'S IT?* games. Sally is a former teacher. We welcome her participation. If you would like to schedule one of these exhibits, please call the Historical Society at 734-662-9092 or Sally at 734-971-5086.

Now we have another request for help. As we get close to opening the Museum, it is becoming clear that we could use a "handy person" for maintenance around the building. We will need help mounting exhibits, so someone with basic carpentry skills would be ideal.

Once we are open, there will always be the occasional plumbing, painting or electrical repair. It would be great if we could find someone "out there" who wouldn't mind a call in such situations. If you are interested in helping out in this way, please call either WCHS or myself.

Karen O'Neal
734-665-2242

SPEAKER TO TALK ABOUT HISTORY OF US-12,SAUK TRAIL FEBRUARY 21

WCHS will gather at the new Pittsfield Township Hall on US-12 Sunday, February 21 to hear about "The Sauk Trail: Roadside Culture and Transportation History in Southern Michigan."

Gladys Saborio will present the history of the US-12 region from Ypsilanti into Hillsdale County. She will also describe efforts to recognize and protect that history as a heritage corridor.

The hall is at 6201 West Michigan Avenue, Ann Arbor, a little way west of Platt Road intersection. Refreshments will be served. The program is open to the public free of charge.

WCHS HAS GOOD START ON NEXT KNAPP'S GOAL

Please keep collecting yellow slips from Bill Knapp's Restaurants toward our next goal which has to be approved by Knapp's.

As reported in the November 1998 Impressions WCHS members and friends have collected the 20,000 points required for a special leather-bound memory book plus a good start on our next goal.

We especially thank the Waterloo Historical Society which had been collecting Knapp's points for sending us their points when they decided to discontinue because they have been unable to collect enough to make it worthwhile.

Anyone may ask for the yellow points slip from the cashier each time. One point is given for each dollar spent. Please give or send them to Alice Ziegler, 537 Riverview Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

QUILT NEEDS SIGNERS

The Signature Quilt is almost filled with signatures. It will be going soon to the U-M Faculty Women's Club Quilting Group to be quilted, in time for the anticipated May opening of the Museum.

If you would like to add your name to the quilt for a $20 donation to the Museum Building Fund, please call WCHS at 734-662-9092 as soon as possible!

TAPPAN'S OBSERVATORY LED WAY TO MODERN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

Almost lost in an aerial view of the sprawling University of Michigan medical campus of today is the small but extremely significant 1854 Detroit Observatory built through the efforts of the U-M's first president, Henry Philip Tappan, and named to honor its major benefactors from Detroit.

"It was really Tappan's idea to construct an observatory on the campus, taking the first step leading to the U-M's present status as a research university," Dr. Patricia (Sandy) Whitesell told the WCHS November audience.

Dr. Whitesell, director and curator of the Observatory and author of *A Creation of His Own: Tappan's Detroit Observatory*, traced the history of the Observatory and illustrated its recent restoration with step-by-step slides.

It was fitting to meet at the Bentley Historical Library, she said, because much of her research was done there.

"The earliest known image of the Observatory is a painting by Jasper Cropsey, a famous painter of the Hudson River School. He came to Ann Arbor in 1855 at the invitation of President Tappan, a personal friend.

"This wonderful image is hanging in the Bentley Library along with the landscape painting of the campus that he did at the same time.

"Cropsey was well known around Ann Arbor for the Observatory painting but I doubt that many of you have actually seen a photograph of him" which she showed.

"The earliest known photograph of the Observatory was taken about 1858 by a photographer named T.D. Tooker. It shows the building when completed, with its faux stone exterior. In contrast the exterior of the building in the Cropsey painting appears to be pink.

"At the time Cropsey painted the building, it hadn't yet received its stucco finish. It is a solid brick building, covered with stucco and scored to look like blocks of stone. The color is added to the wet stucco to give each alternating block a different shade so the effect is that of a stone building.

"A sapling in the old photograph is now a majestic horse chestnut tree that you can see in front of the building," she noted.

"The observatory was the first scientific laboratory on campus."

"In his inaugural speech, Tappan mentioned his desire to create an observatory. Immediately after his speech he was approached by a wealthy Detroit railroad man and banker, Henry Walker."

(Walker was painted by Alva Bradish who painted the portraits of the most prominent citizens of the Detroit area including Tappan.)

"Of course Walker's interest was in applied uses of astronomical time keeping trains on schedule so that they arrived when they said they would and so they wouldn't collide, which happened quite a bit.

"He was also interested because having accurate time would allow financial markets to close at the same time, thereby not giving one person advantage over another in financial matters.

"Tappan and Walker formed an alliance. One of the first things they did was to travel to New York City to purchase a refracting telescope.

"This is the telescope that Henry Fitz made for Ann Arbor, actually the third telescope installed in the dome. The first one he made was rejected by the first director as being deficient. A loaner was brought and put in place. The one eventually accepted as being adequate for the building didn't arrive until 1857, three years later.

Photo by L. Baldwin

BALUSTRADE, MISSING ABOUT 80 YEARS, REPLACED

"The telescope tube was constructed of wood with flexure rods along the sides. The wooden telescope was later refigured with a steel tube. The original wooden tube was removed and apparently discarded although I keep hearing rumors that it's in the basement of one of the dorms on campus.

"This is the elusive Professor Richard Harrison Bull who was professor of engineering at New York University. He was the architect for the building—this is a fact that hasn't been known before.

"There is an entry in the Regents Proceedings saying that Mr. George Bird of New York had designed the Observatory, but there never was any evidence that Mr. Bird actually did design the building and we've never actually figured out who Mr. George Bird was.

"I was able to track down that Professor Bull of New York University was the actual architect of the building. He would have been hired by President Tappan because of Tappan's previous association with New York University as a professor there.

"Tappan often called on his previous colleagues and friends in New York for various consultancies.

"The landscape around the Observatory, shown here in the 1920s, was still mostly open land, no buildings which was a good thing for observational astronomy. You want to have clear skies, open horizon, lack of smoke. There was vibration of course when trains went through.

"A cross-section of the building showed how the solid masonry pier takes up most of the interior space but it does not touch the building at any place so there isn't any vibration, even from someone walking around.

"There is also a pier under the meridian circle telescope in the east wing. In the west wing is the director's office and library."

She showed "what we call the rotunda with columns and lovely archways. Bookcases take up the space between the archway openings."

"There is a staircase that takes us up to the second level where there are a couple of offices and another staircase that leads up to the dome room.

"It is a small building, elegant with respect to architectural details.

"This is the only image we have of the stone clock pier that was removed from the Observatory at some point in history. It had to have been removed using a sledge hammer. We had this pier replicated as part of the restoration of the building. It was lowered through an open roof hatch by an enormous crane.

"This is the Tiede astronomical clock that hung on the pier. It was made in 1854 by Tiede of Berlin. The Bentley Library has kept the clock safe over the past couple of decades, and they have generously agreed to return the clock to the Observatory.

"Henry Walker donated all the money for the meridian circle instrument. A plaque that hangs on the meridian circle telescope acknowledges it."

She happened to find a picture of the warehouse in New York City where the meridian circle telescope was shipped from Europe in 1854. It was then transferred by canal and railroad on to Detroit and Ann Arbor.

"This is a photograph of Franz Brünnow, the German astronomer Tappan hired to check over the meridian circle telescope to be sure it was in proper adjustment before it was shipped to Ann Arbor.

"After Tappan offered the position of director to a couple of American astronomers and was turned down, he had a good idea. Perhaps Brünnow would follow the telescope to Ann Arbor.

"Brünnow accepted the offer and eventually married Tappan's daughter and became part of the family.

"This is the sofa where the observer would lie down and position himself relative to the eye piece of the telescope. It glides on a railroad-style track on the floor and is adjustable in its level of incline just by moving this wooden bar. It's adjustable at both ends.

"This is a reversing carriage which slides underneath the telescope and lifts it up off its mount. Then the astronomer can make observations in the other direction.

"Under these floor panels, which have now been fixed so they hinge open there was another little track. Through research I was able to determine that a table called a reflex table rolled on that track. We don't have that table but I'm trying to figure out exactly what it looked like, and might have a replica of it made. Mercury held in a basin on this table was used for reflex

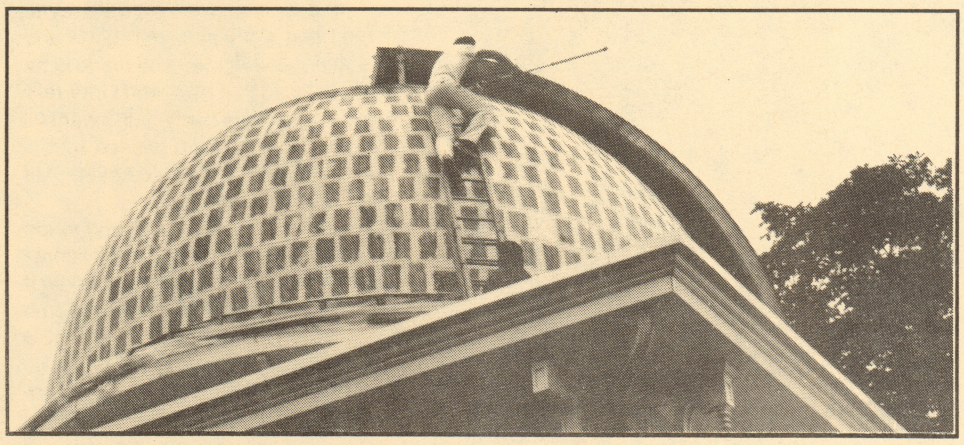

Photo by L. Baldwin

OBSERVATORY DOME STRIPED LIKE A CHECKER BOARD

Before the dome exterior got its final coat of paint, each individual tin plate on the dome was striped to make sure paint got up under the edge. For a while it looked like a checker board.

observations.

"This is a level that hangs on the meridian telescope. It is still extant and hangs on a rack on the wall. It is used to make sure the telescope is in perfect alignment. It's such a precise instrument that there's a three hour procedure done by the astronomers just to make sure the telescope is ready for accurate observation.

"This is one of only two images I have ever seen of the meridian room with its roof hatches open. This image was given to me by the late David Evans of Quinn Evans/Architects.

"You can see that these two panels didn't operate because they had been roofed over. They now function again.

"The observatory was used for weather observation. This is the windvane. We still have it, and it will be displayed in the Observatory's Museum.

"The chronograph we have at the Observatory is not the first one obtained, it was added at a later date. This one was made in Washington D.C.

"This instrument was used to record the position of the stars as they were followed across the meridian. By recording the position of the stars on this piece of paper that is wrapped around the metal drum, the observer could determine the exact time.

"I was fortunate enough to find some of those sheets. They were underneath the desk of a faculty member in the Atmospheric, Oceanic and Space Sciences Department.

"He had rescued them about 15 years ago from a dumpster. They were being discarded along with some old weather data. He saved them all those years until I came along and asked whether there were any old weather instruments that had been used at the observatory.

"He offered them to me. They are the only sheets that are extant from the chronograph. One of them actually was the sheet of paper on which longitude was initially established for Ann Arbor back in 1861.

"There's a picture of it in my book. It's a real treasure.

"This is a picture of a jewelry store in Detroit owned by the Smith's. It was located on Woodward Avenue and there was a time ball on top because he kept the official time for Detroit.

"Telegraph signals were sent to Detroit from Ann Arbor, and Smith would set the time every day at precisely noon. People passing by would set their watches based on the clock in front of Smith's store. That's how time was kept for the city for a number of years.

"This is James Craig Watson, second director of the observatory. When President Tappan was dismissed by the Regents in 1863, Brünnow resigned because of his family connection and loyalty to Tappan.

"Watson had been Brünnow's student, and at times he was Brünnow's only student, but Watson was so excellent in mathematical calculations and in astronomy that Brünnow was pleased to have him."

A collector of stereo images sent her a photograph asking if she could identify the individuals pictured.

"I immediately recognized Watson and was eventually able to determine the identity of all of them—Pickering who went on to be the director of Harvard Observatory, John Van Vleck of Wesleyan University, Regent McIntyre who was interested in astronomy, and Professor Merriman who taught mathematics at Michigan. The photograph was taken at a solar eclipse in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

"This is a photograph of Mrs. Watson at the same eclipse. She was quite capable in astronomy herself although Watson never gave her very much credit for her ability."

"Another early image from the same photograph collector shows the original observatory and the director's residence which was added in 1868. Watson is seen standing outside the building with a telescope on a tripod. You can just barely see Mrs. Watson standing at the corner of the porch.

"The complex grew over time. A classroom building was added in 1908 which also housed a large 37-1\2 inch reflecting telescope that the astronomy department needed in order to keep pace with advances in astronomical science.

"This is the smokestack that eventually caused a lot of interference with observations. You can also see the stairs that went up from Ann Street to the front door of the Observatory. During the restoration we put these stairs back in place.

"The 37-1\2 inch reflecting telescope was made entirely in the observatory shop except for the optics. Unfortunately, the 1908 addition was torn down in 1976.

"It was a controversial issue. Ethel Potts, who is here today, can tell you about it because she was directly involved. But the classroom building was infested by termites and the original building was seen to be the real historical treasure.

"It is debatable, but the building is gone and we have to be very grateful that we still have the original building, and that the University has seen fit to provide funds to restore it.

"The complex included the original building, the director's residence added in 1868 and the large addition in 1908. The observatory also had a student observatory located in back that was built at the expense of the U.S. government.

"Watson made arrangements to have this building constructed for a transit of Venus in 1878, which was a rare astronomical event. So the University got it at virtually no cost. They got the telescopes, too, although the government took the telescopes away after the transit.

"The University did the right thing and provided replacement instruments. The purpose of this building was to provide a facility for students. The faculty were very possessive of the telescopes in the dome and the meridian circle, so the students never got an opportunity to use them."

She showed a photo of the students' refracting telescope made by Alvan Clark and Sons. It is no longer extant except for the optics.

"The Observatory has a real nice collection of instruments that were used at the building. Some were found in the building, some in Kelsey Museum, some in the Department of Astronomy, some in people's homes and people are returning things so they can be integrated into the observatory's museum.

"We are fortunate to have some really nice pictures of people using the equipment. This is Astronomer Paul Smith using a sextant on the roof of the observatory. The old U-M hospital is

RESTORATION PROBLEMS INCLUDE OLD MERCURY

Dr. Whitesell said she found a basin underneath a floor hatch in the observatory with a cover on it.

When I found it, it was full of mercury. Astronomers establish a perfectly level mirror by pouring mercury in this basin, whereas if they were to use a plate glass mirror they could never have the mirror perfectly level.

The mercury had been there for over 140 years. We now know that mercury is toxic, so I had to have a team of trained people come in and spend ten or twelve hours vacuuming up all the mercury that had spilled around this basin.

The mercury had also attached itself to the track and migrated the length of the room.

visible in the background.

"The Observatory, pictured just prior to restoration, was basically sound but there were a lot of things it needed."

She took the audience step-by-step through the restoration process.

"We stopped and asked, ourselves why we should preserve the observatory. It wasn't obvious to everyone although it should be. These are a few of the points we came up with:

1. It's the second oldest standing building on campus. The 1840 President's House is the oldest.

2. It's the oldest building on campus in unaltered form. The President's House has been altered numerous times.

3. The building is the most important physical legacy of President Tappan, the thing he was most proud of in his presidency.

4. And it was really where the research university began, it being the first laboratory on campus.

"I have toured numerous observatories around the country and in Europe and so far it's really the only one I've found that still has its original telescopes in their original mountings and still functional.

"A lot of important astronomers were trained at the Observatory in the 19th century. We regard it as ideal for use as a museum of the early science that took place at the University, as well as a center for the University's early history.

"It's listed in the National Register of Historic Places. That took place in 1973.

She showed a photograph of a telescope pier. "All that's left of the Litchfield Observatory in upstate New York is this pier bearing a little plaque to the astronomer who made his career there. It's kind of sad to see it sitting alone between buildings. This is what we wanted to avoid at Michigan.

Photo by P.S. Whitesell

Meridian circle telescope crated up to protect it during construction.

THE RESTORATION

"Without intervention the building would have eventually deteriorated. It is now in a condition where I am convinced that it will be available 150 years from now for people to learn from and admire.

"Before the contractors got their hands on the building, the first thing I had to do was to move out every single thing in the building to protect it during the construction phase "

University movers helped her pack up all the scientific instruments in specially made plywood crates and move them into storage.

"We protected things we couldn't move out by building structures around them because we knew that plaster would be falling and people would be swinging 2x4s around the historic telescopes which are irreplaceable. This crating technique was successful.

"The enormous plywood crate that covered the refracting telescope in upright position we called the 'rocket ship.'

"The next thing we did was to strip paint off the stone piers in the meridian room. We put the telescope on the reversing carriage and slid it out of the way. Several coats of white paint were removed from the piers to reveal the original limestone. It was interesting that there were some fossils embedded in the limestone.

"The next step was to restore the interior of the dome. This had been painted in the 1980s when Nick and Peg Steneck tried to undertake a restoration of the building. They were successful in maintaining the building so it could make it until the 1990s for the complete restoration.

"We looked for any possible leaks in the dome. We found several and repaired them. Since we were about to undertake a complete restoration of the interior of the dome we wanted to make sure that the exterior was watertight.

"Then the exterior of the dome was stripped and primed, and each individual tin plate on the exterior of the dome was striped to make sure paint got up under the edges. For a while it looked like a checkerboard.

"Then the interior was totally restored by removing the canvas and paper that lined the interior of the dome and replacing some damaged boards.

"It was only by taking down the canvas that lined the interior that we realized how the dome had been constructed."

They found long strips of cotton canvas glued up to the interior of the dome.

"We were surprised to find that they had used wallpaper over the canvas to make a nice smooth surface to accept paint. They used paper with a little blue flower pattern, but we used plain wall liner to replace it.

"I think this is a unique dome interior. I've never seen another like it. We presume that it was constructed in this way to make it really light, to have a really smooth surface for painting, and it's also breathable. We were really pleased with the result when we were done.

"We also had a problem with birds and insects entering the dome. The dome is an unheated space so that heat won't interfere with observations. We really didn't want all the damage that was being caused by the birds and infestation of bees, so a system of bird deterrent was developed."

"We used a fine mesh screen and strips of stainless steel with holes in it, then simple weather stripping installed at an angle so it maintains contact with the edge of the dome to prevent birds from getting in. "It's simple but very effective and very inexpensive."

"The hatches of the meridian room were opened for the very first time in several decades. It had been roofed over with roll roofing and insulation and lots of black tar.

"It was a really wonderful occasion to have that hatch reopened and the sunlight streaming in the meridian room.

"We had done some preliminary investigation to see what was under that roll roofing and we were really pleased to find that the original roof was underneath.

"We made an agreement with the contractor to remove all the asphalt roofing material so we could take photographs of the original roof to document every step. Then the original roof was removed and replicated.

"The only variation we made of any substance was to use lead-coated copper instead of the original tin. It was very successful. The results look just like 1854.

"One of the things we found when removing the original roof was that the contractor who had replaced the roof on the meridian room wing in 1866 had signed the original material. It said 'C. Fischer, Ann Arbor, Mich.'

"I had the contractor cut that piece out and it will appear in our museum as an artifact. You can also see that the contractor numbered each strip of the tin so that they would know in what order to place them down.

"Besides birds in the dome we also had insects in the building. There was an enormous honey bee hive about six feet long in the cornice on the back side of the observatory.

"The University would spray it every year but the honey bees would come back and re-establish their hive. When I found it, it had an active colony of honey bees. If you know anything about honey bees in Michigan you will know that they are endangered due to mites.

"Since these bees were mite-free we decided we would call in a bee keeper and relocate the bees to a safe place. (Roger Sutherland in the audience identified himself as the bee keeper.)

"We also replaced the missing balustrade over the front porch of the Observatory. We replicated it based on early photographs. It had been missing for about 80 years.

"There was a lot of trim work that needed to be replaced. The University shop had to specially replicate them, including dozens of finials. The Italianate brackets had their paint stripped.

"The painter drilled holes in a board to hold

the finials so he could paint them all in a row. There must have been 8 or 10 different sizes.

"We had many of the windows in the building restored. In some of them the glass was actually curved.

"We had stucco repairs done and there was a lot of tuck pointing to do on the foundation.

"We had water problems at the south wall so it was excavated, water proofed and filled back in.

"At this point in the project we didn't have the exterior shutters yet, but the dome is all painted. We were trying desperately to get the exterior work finished so we could move inside for the winter.

"We did a couple of things inside the building that were quite major such as moving a couple of doors back to their original position.

"There were extensive plaster repairs and the entire building was rewired to bring it up to modern electrical code. The building is solid brick and we didn't want a lot of exposed conduit, so in some cases we had to cut channels in the brick to hide modern wiring.

"We were able to keep some of the old switches although they had to be adapted in order to make them safe.

"It became evident to us by chipping away at the many layers of paint on the central telescope pier that it had a beautiful appearance underneath the layers. The original gray stucco had a little painted black line that made the scores in stucco look like blocks of stone.

"If we had used chemical strippers, that black line would have been removed. It took a team of people dressed in suits to protect them from the lead in the paint about two solid weeks to reveal this beautiful original appearance.

"We also had University carpenters build some wooden doors for some of the book cases around the main pier. Two of the bookcases already had glass doors. In order to make the bookcases work for exhibits, we really needed to have doors on all the cases.

"We replicated the old doors and even went to the extent of getting restoration glass so we'd have wavy glass.

"This is the stone pier in the meridian room. I pointed out that it had been removed at some point in history. We wanted to recreate it and put it back in place. It weighs about two tons.

"It was wrapped in a steel cage in order to transport it by means of a huge crane. It was passed down through the open hatch in the meridian room roof. It was a very delicate, complicated, nerve wracking procedure that went without a hitch.

"Besides the restoration of the building, we also restored the refracting telescope. It had many layers of different colors of paint—white and gray and light blue. Underneath all of this other paint was its original shiny black.

"The telescope worked fine, and we considered taking it back to its original wooden tube, but it was finally decided by committee that not enough was known about wooden tube technology to insure that if we did take it back to its original wooden tube that it would work properly.

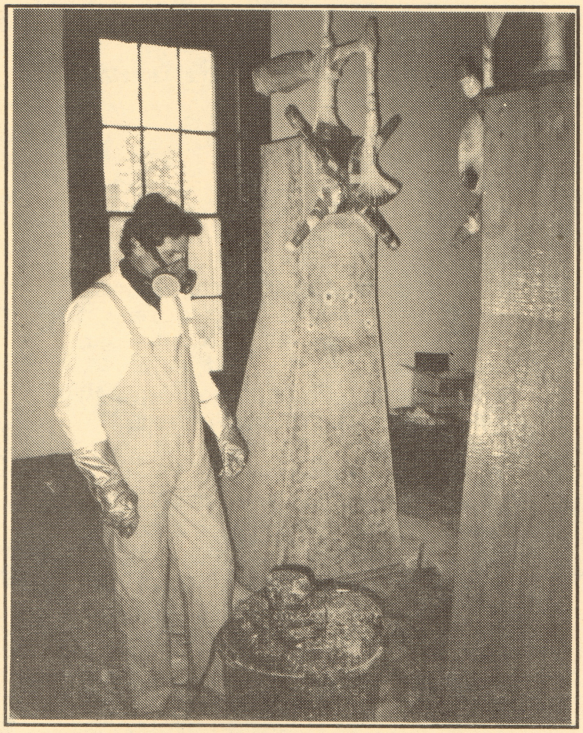

Photo by P.S. Whitesell

The suit and other gear are to protect the crew stripping paint off the limestone piers of the meridian circle telescope from lead in the paint.

"So the committee decided that we would retain the telescope's metal tube which had been replaced in 1907 to be sure that we would have a telescope we could use for instructional purposes.

"I hunted around the country for about a year before I finally found a fellow who restored telescopes who was willing to come to Ann Arbor for about 2 or 2 1/2 months to work on this telescope and restore it.

"This is Christopher Ray of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. Notice that he has on his Michigan astronomy shirt. He spent two months here working right in the dome room. Some scaffolding was erected around the telescope that we used to lower so he could do his work right in the dome room. The telescope was too large to take out of the building."

"He stripped the many layers of paint off the telescope. He took each individual piece from the telescope and restored it. It was primed, then painted, then ready to hoist back up into its mount with these soft straps and a spreader bar attached to a winch."

She showed recent pictures of the Observatory now that it's restoration is nearing completion.

"I'm quite pleased with our ability to transform this building for handicap access. This is our handicap ramp on the east side of the building. It is camouflaged to look like the foundation wall made of fieldstone and topped with a water table limestone to replicate what the foundation wall of the original building looks like.

"From the side of the building all you see is the railing which over time will become tarnished so it won't be quite as prominent.

"We added a door which really wasn't a new opening because there had been a door there that led into the original building from the 1908 addition. We also converted our rest room so it is handicap accessible; only our second floor remains inaccessible.

"There seemed no way to make that accessible, but the student observatory on top of Angell Hall is so there is a telescope on campus accessible to the handicapped."

She showed some pictures of the restoration taken by Stephen Graham which are to be featured in the February issue of *Architecture Magazine*. WCHS is the first group to see these wonderful photographs," she said. She especially noted one with the soft glow of lights on the inside, another in the basement where you can see the central pier which goes 15 feet below ground level.

They have a park bench so you can go and eat your lunch on the grounds.

She showed the rotunda with restored cabinets in their original finish. "The colors you see throughout the building are the originals from 1854 determined through microscopic analysis of paint scrapings.

"We finished the walls in a nice khaki green color. We were quite surprised to find that the ceiling in the rotunda area was pale yellow.

"This is the library. These are some of the instruments we will have on display in our museum. The University made an oak table, based on the old library style table with drawer fronts along the side. We ordered some 1930s style chairs to go with the table.

"The woodwork in this room was originally grain painted to simulate the look of oak. We had a consultant come in and replicate that with a wonderful result."

In the meridian room they replaced the door to its original location. "Through research I determined that the observer's sofa was originally upholstered in leather and tufted. Our U-M upholstery shop was able to replicate that original appearance.

"The stairs were also grain painted as they were originally.

"The only thing I did different and new in this room was to add some hanging lights of a type that could have been used at the time electricity was added. There was only one bare light bulb mounted on the wall and that wasn't really adequate.

"We have retained the original hand operation of the dome which is unusual. Most old observatories in the country have converted to electricity to rotate the dome.

"We owe it all to President Tappan." She showed a little known photograph of him taken in Dublin about 1878. "I haven't seen this photograph published anywhere but in my book."

"Brünnow, Tappan's son-in-law, had gotten a position as the astronomer royal at the Dunsink Observatory in Ireland. Tappan sat for this portrait when he went to visit him."

FRENCH SNUB DARWIN, AS 'NOT IN FIRST RANK'

"(Charles) Darwin was not elected by the French Academy but insolently snubbed by a large majority. One of the leading Academicians gave as a reason for the maneuver that the author of *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man* has too far sacrificed science to renown and reason to imagination, to deserve a place in the first rank of scientists. In his last work he has too much belittled himself not to be made to expiate it."

From *Harper's Bazaar* December 7, 1872, page 795.

'ELEGANT' MANSARD ROOFS CONDEMNED AS FIRE HAZARD

"The elegant Mansard roofs which capped many of the finest granite stores and warehouses of Boston have proved fatal ornaments. Combustible in themselves, out of the reach of water from fire engines, and high enough most effectually to scatter masses of burning fragments, they spread destruction far and wide. This new feature in architecture has proved too expensive altogether. Mansard roofs should not be allowed in cities. Will other cities ere long be shrouded in the gloom of a fiery calamity because they are slow in learning plain lessons."

From *Harper's Bazaar*, December 7, 1872. page 799. Editor's note: Although not as large or fatal as the Chicago Fire in 1871, a major fire in 1872 in Boston destroyed 60 acres of business district. The Mansard roofs were apparently made of wood.

AROUND THE COUNTY

Chelsea Historical Society: The Depot Museum is open 1-3 p.m. Saturdays or by appointment, 475-7047.

Pittsfield Society: The new society is seeking suggestions for inexpensive speakers, programs and projects to start with. They ask that other societies put them on their mailing list at P.O Box 6013, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Salem Society: Annual meeting and election of officers following 6 p.m. potluck dinner at Salem Township Hall, 9600 Six Mile Road, Thursday, March 25.

Saline Society: Depot Museum open 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays or by appointment, 429-9621.

Ypsilanti Society: Museum, 220 N. Huron St., open 2-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Archives open 9 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday.

Automotive Heritage Museum in Depot Town open 2:30-6 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday and noon-5 p.m. Sunday.

HOW TO JOIN

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to WCHS Membership, c/o Patty Creal, Treasurer, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336.

Annual dues are: individual, $15; couple, $25; student or senior(60+), $10; senior couple, $19; business/association, $50; patron, $100. Information:734-662-9092.

ARTIFACTS TO DONATE?

Anyone wishing to donate an artifact to WCHS may contact: Judy Chrisman, collections chair, at 734-769-7859 or by mail, 1809 Dexter Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

PRESERVATION NETWORK CONFERENCE IN MONROE

The Michigan Historic Preservation Network presents its 19th annual state-wide conference, "Doing it Right: Getting the results you want through good preservation," including the new full-day Construction Trades Symposium at Monroe, Michigan.

It will be Thursday-Saturday, April 22-24 at the St. Mary Conference Center. Information: (248) 625-8181.

"WHAT'S IT? GAME, LOAN BOXES OFFERED BY WCHS

WCHS offers traveling exhibits of small artifacts, set up as a humorous 'What is it? games to schools for children and another for adults. They are available free for classes and meetings.

Loan boxes, "Life Before Electricity" and "From Hats to Spats" are available to teachers for $15 rental charge. See Karen's Column page 1 about new education chairman, and numbers to contact.

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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

'THE SAUK TRAIL'

2 p.m. • Sunday February 21, 1999

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